

People who don't drink may still suffer harms from alcohol, study suggests

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Harms to people resulting from alcohol consumption by others in Germany in 2014 are assessed in a study published in the open access journal *BMC Medicine*.

Much of the research into [alcohol](#)-associated harms investigates harm to the drinker, not to other individuals. Researchers at Institute for Therapy Research in Bayern, Germany, estimated the harms caused to others by alcohol during pregnancy, in [road traffic accidents](#), and as a result of interpersonal violence. The authors conclude that the harmful effects of alcohol on people other than the drinker need to be recognized as a public health problem, and effective ways of preventing such harms are required.

Dr. Ludwig Kraus, the corresponding author, said: "This study estimates some of the most severe harms that alcohol use may cause to other people than the drinker, namely [fetal alcohol syndrome](#) (FAS), fetal alcohol spectrum disorders (FASD), road traffic fatalities caused by drunk drivers, and deaths resulting from alcohol-attributable interpersonal violence."

The authors found that alcohol was responsible for 1,214 (45.1%) third-party road traffic deaths and 55 (14.9%) interpersonal violence deaths, and was implicated in 2,930 incidences of FAS and 12,650 cases of FASD. The authors note that FAS and FASD are not the only potential consequences of drinking alcohol during pregnancy. Overall, these results indicate that alcohol may not only cause harm to the drinker, but also substantial harm to third parties.

Dr. Kraus said: "Although the estimates across the three harm domains are not directly comparable, the results suggest that alcohol use in pregnancy followed by road traffic fatalities account for significantly more harm to others than alcohol-related violence."

To investigate the potential [harm](#) caused by alcohol to third parties, the authors examined [survey data](#) on the prevalence of alcohol use during pregnancy to estimate incidences of FAS and FASD in Germany. Cause-of-death statistics provided estimates of third party traffic deaths and

interpersonal violence deaths thought to be caused by alcohol.

The authors caution that accurately assessing the prevalence and extent of [alcohol use](#) during pregnancy in Germany is challenging as the data are self-reported and so may be vulnerable to bias or misremembering.

Dr. Kraus said: "Although measures such as pricing policies or limiting the marketing of alcoholic beverages are unpopular, targeted measures addressing particular populations at risk, such as women of childbearing age or road users, may help to reduce harms to others as well as harms to the drinker."

More information: Quantifying harms to others due to alcohol consumption in Germany: a register-based study, Kraus et al. *BMC Medicine* 2019, [DOI: 10.1186/s12916-019-1290-0](https://doi.org/10.1186/s12916-019-1290-0)

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